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Transcript of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Media Availability with Sen. Feinstein Discussing California's Water Infrastructure, Delta Fix

Time: 1:10 p.m.
Date: Tuesday, August 21, 2007
Event: Media Availability, InterContinental Hotel, Grand Salon 2, 2151 Avenue
of the Stars, Los Angeles, CA

SENATOR FEINSTEIN:

As you probably can see, the Governor and I and others have had an opportunity to begin a discussion on options for the Delta. This is not an easy subject, but it's a subject that really should involve all California. I'm really delighted that the Governor has this interest. I have the interest. I'm delighted that Congresswoman Grace Napolitano who is chairman of the Water and Power Committee of the House of Representatives is able to be here, because whatever it is that we do, we have to do it together. And it's going to be big; it's going to be costly. But the Delta is a critical water resource for all of California.

I have just one statistic, one only, and that is 25 million people depend on Delta water for the drinking water of the state. And the probability of a big earthquake over 6.7 is 75% in the next 30 years. And if that were to happen, there are all indications that the Delta could collapse, the water would be gone, there would be no water for drinking, there would be no water for agriculture, there would be no water for fish, marsh, ecosystems.

So we've got a big job ahead of us, and I am convinced it should be bipartisan, and I believe that's Governor Schwarzenegger's intention as well. And so I look very much forward to working with him and to try to carry out a state/federal partnership that can get the job done.

Governor, take it away.

GOVERNOR SCHWARZENEGGER:

Thank you very much, Senator, and I am very happy that I have such a great partner here. Senator Feinstein is very dedicated about this and is very hardworking and has

been just very supportive of really fixing our water crisis and then in really making sure that we can provide reliable and safe water in the future.

Right now we can't say that, because we are very, very vulnerable. We have 25 million people in California that are getting their water from the Delta. If we have just a levee break alone, that could disrupt our water flow to southern California, Los Angeles and so on for 18 million people for up to two years, just to show you how vulnerable we are.

And this is a crisis that has been existing since the late '70s, early '80s. And it was always considered the political risky thing to tackle, but the fact of the matter is that's what we need to do. And I think if Democrats and Republicans and the environmentalists and the water users and everyone works together here, including the farmers, agriculture people, everyone works together, then we can do it. I have great hopes in this whole thing, and I think if all the experts are part of this team now, and Phil Isenberg who is studying this issue and we are waiting for his report, so I'm very happy about this.

Thank you very much. If you have any questions, please.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS:

Q: First, Senator, you opposed the Peripheral Canal in 1982 very strongly. I believe you were mayor of San Francisco at the time. What has changed?

FEINSTEIN: First of all, would you introduce yourself?

Q: Sure. I'm Tom Elias. I write a syndication -

FEINSTEIN: Oh, hi, Tom. I didn't recognize you. I read your by-line all the time.
Okay. You're right, I was. As a matter of fact, it was Sunne McPeak that came into my office in 1982 and said would you be the first signature on the petition to put it on the ballot, and I said yes, and I did. And I'll be very clear. At the time the situation was different. We knew much less than we know today. There was a lot of objection to a peripheral canal. I signed it, as you know. The people voted positively on the petition.
Today as I look at this, I have to look at it, Tom, only one way, and that's with a completely open mind, to take the best scientific facts of the time and try to put it together in a proposal that will have the kind of flexibility that will meet the criteria Dr. Mount spoke about, which is that you do one thing and something unanticipated could happen. That's all I know to tell you is keep that open mind. The situation is very different today than it was 25 years ago, in my view.

The difference is we know much more. I had then no idea of the condition of the levees that I do today. The earthquake probabilities have changed in the last 25 years. The ecosystem itself has changed. As you know, even when CALFED was first proposed back in the '90s the delta smelt perked up. It looked like things were going to go well. And then the decline began.

So we have a very volatile region, and the only thing I can tell you is keep an open mind, get the best science, work together -- environmentalists, stakeholders, water users, water contractors, AG cities, Governor, Senate, Assembly, State Senate. It's the only way we're going to get there. And I am absolutely dedicated to do that because this is so important.

Q: Governor, my question for you is slightly unrelated. You've been around the world promoting the global warming cause, and yet you submitted a budget to the Legislature that cut out the money for the Williamson Act subsidy, \$39 million. Your press secretary wrote me an e-mail telling me that you had no idea how much carbon that farmland, 16 ½ million acres, sequesters. I then wrote a column in which I reported on a Purdue University study saying it sequesters at least 1.8 million tons of carbon per year, the land protected by the Williamson Act.

Knowing that, sir, do you plan to veto the Williamson Act money that the Legislature has restored to the budget?

GOVERNOR: Well, first of all I have good news, because the budget passed and we do have a budget, and -

Q: I know that.

GOVERNOR: I'm very happy that you know it. And I also want to tell you that I'm very happy that they restored the Williamson Act.

It is all a matter of money. And when you do a budget and you're the governor and you've promised the people that we're going to bring down the structural deficit from \$16.5 billion where we were three and half years ago when I took office to now down to zero, that is an extraordinary accomplishment. But it only can be done if you're willing to make certain cuts. And I think the legislators were very helpful with that, the Republicans were helpful with that, the Democrats were helpful. And it's a budget that we all can be very proud of, because this budget not only cuts it down to zero, the structural deficit, but it also invests in the future. We fully fund education. And also on top of that we are paying off our debt,

and we put the reserve aside, the largest reserve in history with \$3.6 billion.

I'm going to sign off on that budget, because as I said, I'm proud of that budget. There will be nothing -- that will not be vetoed.

Q: While we're on the subject, if you could address this one issue. The Attorney General held a news conference today. The Republican minority leadership in the Senate was concerned about lawsuits from the AG's office regarding transportation projects and the bond money. Could you address that? Is your office intent on reining in any lawsuits from the Attorney General against cities and counties and that was why we have an agreement today?

GOVERNOR: First of all, as you know, the Attorney General's office is totally separate and independent. We don't control the Attorney General, and we're very lucky that that's the way the law is.

But, what is important is that because AB 32 is so new, and the tailpipe emissions standards and the low carbon fuel standards, all of those things are so new that it is very important that the senators, Democrats and Republicans and Assembly Democrats and Republicans, the Attorney General, everyone gets on the same page and walks in the same direction. Because right now it's so new that there was a tendency that everyone was crossing and people trying to jump over their own shadow. They shouldn't do that.

What we want to do is that by the year 2020 we want to have a reduction of 25% of greenhouse gases. Go back to the 1990 level. That's what we will accomplish if we all work together. That's what we are trying to do.

Q: Governor, I don't think I understand you. On the budget, you have been talking about \$700 million in vetoes. Does that mean with this new budget you're not going to need that?

GOVERNOR: I have promised both parties that I will veto it down from \$700 million to zero. That we will have zero, there will be no structural -- there will be no deficit this year in our budget.

Q: So is it still \$700 million that you're going to have to deal with?

GOVERNOR: That's right. That's correct.

Q: And what will be cut in order to do that?

GOVERNOR: You don't have enough time for me to give you the list, trust me. There's a lot of things.

Q: Governor, do you think CALFED was successful and a worthwhile expenditure of taxpayer dollars?

GOVERNOR: Say again?

Q: Do you think that CALFED was a worthwhile expenditure of taxpayer dollars?

GOVERNOR: I think so, yes.

Q: Why?

GOVERNOR: Because I think so.

Q: Okay. And given the Delta vision and other plans for the Delta under consideration, does CALFED have a role going forward? And if so, what is it?

GOVERNOR: Yes, they will. As a matter of fact, I think the Senator and I have said earlier I think that the only way this works is if everyone works together, and all the stakeholders. And I think that we are always very happy to get their input also.

FEINSTEIN: If before -- I have a list of things for you anticipating the question what CALFED has done, and we'll make it available to you after this. It's about a million additional acre feet of water, for starters. And so that's all broken down so you can take a look at it.

Q: Senator, can you respond to this one issue. The Delta is a Northern California, largely has been perceived as a Northern California issue. I talked with a legislator once newly elected from Southern California, who knew nothing about it until she arrived on a Southwest flight and actually looked down at it. Is there not a disconnect between the voter-rich Southern California and the political will that you need for development of the Delta restoration?

FEINSTEIN: You're very correct. And I think that's true to a great extent. The water comes from the north. That's particularly true following the Colorado River Agreement, because we drop our take from the Colorado River, and that affects the southern part of the state.

People in the north feel very strongly about protecting what they consider their basic riparian right which is the water. And so it has to be very sensitively handled. It has to be bipartisan. We have to take into consideration the concerns of the north.

The south is so big with two-thirds of the state that people often look at the Delta as being just something that's amorphous, that doesn't matter. The fact of the matter is, it's a very big deal. It's the source of all of this water. And particularly with global warming now.

And I really would like to take a moment to compliment the Governor, because it's very hard back in Washington, and very often we use the gains made by California under the Governor's leadership to really say, this is how things should be done. And that's very special to be in the front rather than the caboose at the end of the train. And the State has been there.

So this is not going to be an easy one, and it's going to have to be handled sensitively. You have to have some respect for the fact that as the Sierra-Nevada snow pack dries up, that affects our water take even more.

So we've got a lot of work to do, bottom line.

Q: (Inaudible)...for those 25 million people who are relying on the Delta program? I mean, my car gets watered three times a day because I'm parking next to a public lawn. I think it's a waste.

GOVERNOR: First of all, I think that you're absolutely correct. Public relations and to really communicate with the public about, first of all that we have a water crisis, second of all that conservation is a very important part for us to solve the problem, and that we have to build, that we have to build water storage and that we have to look at the Delta, we have to fix the Delta, we have to fix the ecosystem.

And we have to let the people know that the system that we have in place now has been build for a population of 18 to 20 million. But in the meantime, because we haven't done anything for 30 years, we have gone up to 37 million. And very soon, by the time this project -- if we make a decision right now, today, this project will be built, will be finished being built maybe 15 or 20 years from now. By that time we're going to have 50 million people.

So this is why today we have to make plans not for 37 million people, we have to make plans for enough water for 60 million

people, because that's how far we have to think in the future. And it's very important to let the people know that yes, they're our levees, even though they think they're in Holland, we have levees in California. And yes there is a Delta, and that we must protect the Delta.

FEINSTEIN: Thank you everybody.

GOVERNOR: Thank you very much.

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